

Program and Position Status

Sixty-three percent of respondents did not expect to be coaching forensics more than five years from now. That nearly two-thirds of respondents plan to leave the forensic activity by the end of the century is cause for concern. It also warrants attention to questions of program and position status and searches for forensic educators.

While most the largest proportion of respondents (58%) expressed the expectation that, as they leave their positions, those positions will remain stable, 15% indicated that the forensic position will be eliminated when they leave. About the same number perceived the likelihood that the position would become tenure-track (7%) as would lose tenure-track status (9%); similarly, about the same number expected the forensic position would become full-time (7%) as would become part-time (6%).

Forensics Searches. Half of the respondents reported that a forensics search had been conducted at their institution in the past five years. Of these searches, an average of 4 in 5 was successfully completed. Among those responding to questions about the searches, nearly half perceived that the number of applicants in these searches was lower than for other comparable positions in the department (16% reported more applicants) and 36% perceived the quality of applicants to be lower (27% reported higher quality). This information—in conjunction with the findings reported above concerning program mission statements, job descriptions, and evaluation criteria—provides the basis for at least two cautions to those preparing to launch searches. First, when other humanities and social science positions are drawing pools of more than a hundred applicants, departmental colleagues and college administrators need to be appropriately prepared for the possibility of and reasons for a smaller group of applicants for a forensics hire. In particular, temptations to separate the rhetorical teacher-scholar from the forensics coach (analogous to the model finding increasing resonance in athletic departments) need to be carefully examined for their long-term impact on the strength and stability of the forensics program. Second, position priorities need to be sorted out with search committees in advance. In many programs, directing forensics is one portion of the job responsibilities of a given position; the relative importance of forensics preparation among candidates' preparation for other job responsibilities should be consonant with departmental and college commitments to the forensics program.

51. When I leave my current position in forensics, I believe the position will

1 remain full-time, tenure track:	84	49%
2 become full-time, tenure track:	12	7%
3 remain full-time, but no longer be tenure track:	15	9%
4 become full-time, but not be tenure track:	12	7%
5 remain part-time, non-tenure track:	15	9%
6 become part-time, non-tenure track:	10	6%
7 be eliminated:	25	15%

- G2. There has been a search for a forensic educator for our program within the past five years. (Use most recent case if there have been multiple searches.)

Yes	No	(If no, skip to G6.)	
95	91		NR=7
51%	49%		

- G3. This search

was successful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	was suspended
	63	9	0	6	3	2	9	NR=101
	69%	10%	0	7%	3%	2%	10%	Mean 2.1

- G4. The number of applicants in this search was _____ than comparable positions in the department.

				similar				
higher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	lower
	4	1	8	29	6	14	16	NR=115
	5%	1%	10%	37%	8%	18%	21%	Mean 4.8

- G5. The quality of applicants in this search was _____ than comparable positions in the department.

				similar				
higher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	lower
	3	7	11	29	5	13	9	NR=116
	4%	9%	14%	38%	7%	17%	12%	Mean 4.3

Conclusion

This preliminary assessment of the professional climate of forensics education is a work in progress. I hope, both for the benefit of other perspectives on the data and for the time needed for additional analysis, that the project will be joined by more colleagues in the forensic community. Three particular kinds of work need to be done.

First, further research can be completed with the survey data. This work includes many sets of crosstabulations and correlational analyses which would provide more detailed assessments of the profession. For example, it may be interesting to learn more about how the various kinds of training for entering forensic education interact with perceptions of strengths and weakness in professional preparation. Another follow-up project could examine the interaction of responses regarding program mission, position description and evaluation, and departmental support for forensic programs. The written comments could also be a focus for further study, either alone or in combination with the quantitative data.

Second, as noted above, part of the work which needs to be done includes continuing education for directors of forensics. Only six Ph.D. granting speech communication programs in the nation offer coursework in forensics (Hassencahl, 1993). Members of the forensic community can supplement opportunities available (or not available) in graduate programs with seminars at regional and national conventions directed to teaching and professional development concerns of potential and new coaches. Models exist in the Speech Communication Association's preconferences, such as "Preparing Tomorrow's Professoriate to Teach"; in short courses, such as the Cross

Examination Debate Association's training on issues of discrimination and sexual harassment; and Pi Kappa Delta's professional development seminars.

Third, we need direct action to recruit and retain excellent forensic educators. Positive steps include helping graduate assistants to avoid "burn out," perhaps by rotating teaching/coaching staffs, allowing forensics assistants greater opportunity to develop classroom teaching skills, and giving them reasonable opportunities to complete theses and dissertations. ABD forensics faculty need similar "protection" and encouragement. The American Forensic Association could prepare a position paper on standards for release time parallel to those standards which exist for music and theatre educators. We can assist our coaching colleagues in drafting and affirming program mission statements, reasonable job descriptions, clear professional development plans, and standards of evaluation for advancement. We need to foster leadership development and integrate new directors into regional and national organizations. We need to continue to be good mentors for one another. Perhaps, above all, we need to follow the advice of the many respondents who wrote about director choice: Those who find a clear sense of mission for themselves and their programs also find most comfort in the professional climate of their forensics community.

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Notes

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Another objective of this project was to gather data that could be used by other members of the forensics community for further analysis and discussion. Crosstabulations and other more sophisticated statistical analyses need to be applied to this data. The narrative comment file deserves content analysis. If you would like to do further work with the quantitative or qualitative survey data, please contact me.

THE EMERGING ROLE OF THE WORLD-WIDE-WEB IN FORENSICS: ON COMPUTER-MEDIATED RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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This contribution demonstrates how the World-Wide-Web (WWW) can be used when conducting forensics research and in developing an online forensics community. To accomplish these objectives, we explain what the WWW is, briefing its properties and functions (I). Then, we list and critique the WWW's popular "general search mechanisms" to help the competitor find general sites and publicly available documents on

the WWW (II). More focused to the specific mission of this article, we next concentrate on those search engines and databases devoted strictly to archiving news (III). In conclusion, we call for a collective assemblage of hypertext markup language (HTML) authors dedicated—by state, region, and organization, to building an electronic forensic community (IV).

Over the past two decades, the means by which scholars conduct academic research and inquiry have been modernized through revolutionary advances in computer-mediated communication. Many now regard the card catalog, *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, and other bulky indexes that used to consume vast amounts of library space, as antiquated and time-consuming fixtures. Further, while the increasing power and declining cost of personal computers have liberated the modern library of these archaic instruments, they have equally emancipated the individual from the library. Researchers may now, defying our traditional understandings of time and space, "login" with their institutional libraries via modem, or connect to the Internet through a private Internet access provider. For those who possess the equipment, access, and training needed to work these library databases, the procurement of knowledge has become easy and individualized.

The "Third Wave" of technological revolution that Toeffler (1980) so prophetically envisioned, where "the de-massification of the media also de-massifies our minds,"¹ awaits our fancy at the other end of the cable. Toeffler believed that the continued growth of our mass media outlets, including the inter-networking of personal computers, would result in a colossal arena of diverse information where the human mind would become more individualized. How we should engage this very real historical moment in time, both as academicians and as a forensics community, is the overarching concern of this work.

It is our belief that the decentralized, diffused emergence of information outlets on the WWW—convincing proof of Toeffler's Third Wave—represents a significant opportunity for forensics education. It is imperative that forensicators adapt to this paradigmatic shift between conventional and technological modes of learning, so that they can expeditiously locate the pertinent information needed for competition. In keeping with this responsibility, we have restricted the focus of this text exclusively to the WWW, because, as *Hobbes' Internet Timeline v2.5* reports, the number of network sites (measured by registered domain name declaration) being homesteaded on the WWW have phenomenally increased over the past two years; translating, we believe, into the categorical establishment of a new mass medium. Consider, for example, the following growth curve: 20,000 domain names were declared in March 1992; 22,000 in March 1993; 50,000 in November 1994; 120,000 in July 1995; 240,000 in March 1996; and lastly, 475,000 in July 1996.² Above E-mail, Telnet, Gopher, Archie, Jughead, or Veronica, the WWW possesses a stand alone credibility as the preferred computer-mediated platform for information warehouses.

Attempting to bring some forensic-minded order to this expanding landscape, we have categorized and abstracted a host of noteworthy WWW sites that should be of value to the competitor. Obviously, this cannot be an all-encompassing list. Even as the reader makes their way through this

article, another innovative site, with better, perhaps more precise information, is being activated. Yet, we do believe that (to date) we have compiled and qualified some of the more universally beneficial sites available. Before the reader embarks upon this review, however, a foundational understanding of the WWW and its properties is required.

I. The Free-flowing Essence of the WWW

The European Laboratory for Particle Physics created the WWW as a means for individuals to access information in textual and visual form from computer databases around the world. It is a liberal structure that, by its very progressive nature, encourages participants to contribute documents to popular global accessibility. The WWW Consortium, recognized as the official agency facilitating the development of the network, describes the system in its *Background and History* webpage as, "the universe of network-accessible information, an embodiment of human knowledge."³ The WWW, for all intents and purposes, is our *de facto* public domain of digital knowledge.

Tim Berners-Lee is credited with designing the WWW in reaction to the arcane rules and bare-bones interfaces of the Internet. Basically, Berners-Lee made the rugged code and syntax, once required in Internet communication, user-friendly. The user's WWW experience is based upon hypertext markup language (HTML), which is, when compared to more eclectic languages, one of the easiest codes to learn and apply. In fact, it is so simplistic and popular, that more elite software developers do not even recognize it as a legitimate language. These WWW documents, consisting of this hidden language, allow the user to access text, software files, pictures, sounds, and even movies stored on one or multiple systems. As a result, HTML documents are vivid, multidimensional products that lend themselves well to research and presentation.

Yet, like all other ways of bringing order to the anarchy of the Internet, which is sometimes better understood as the "space between computer lines," the WWW defies our traditional conceptions of non-computer space. Hypertextual "boundaries" are theoretical, rather than physical; "pathways" are evanescent, and subject to individual selection rather than possessing static architectures. Thus, the WWW has not only revolutionized the means by which we can obtain information, but, by its fluid architecture, it has liberated the entire notion of information accessibility.

More important, however, is the deeper reaching issue of any Internet document's validity. Since the Internet has been publicized as the silicon-messiah of the Information Age, novice users, at first blush, are frequently disenchanted with the global network's capabilities.⁴ Many find it to be a rather shallow environment, filled with hyper-advertising, insensitive and inflammatory rhetoric, and a repetitious cycle of electronic chain letters. While some rubbish does regrettably exist, a more focused understanding of the well-managed databases and research systems available to the user provides a wider range of capabilities. As with Adam Smith's friction-free theory of marketplace capitalism, or even your local library, the guiding logic to remember is: *caveat emptor*—let the buyer beware. Given any documentation, the writer's perspective, motive, and reliability must be questioned.

In sequence, we first appraise the widely popular WWW general search mechanisms; second, we critique several popular news engines.

II. WWW General Search Mechanisms

It seems that with every month's passing, a new general search mechanism, oftentimes called a search engine, is being posted on the WWW for public use. Most of these devices locate information through either: (1) a search application called a "spider" or "knowbot" that scans an entire collection of links maintained on a constantly updated database (usually through automated inquiry); (2) a topically managed collection of links (usually obtained through popular submission by a document's author)⁵; or (3) a convergence of these two methods. Whatever form they may assume, we, the public, should be thankful that these services are offered, since the plurality of databases enhances our overall probability of finding the information that we need. This competitive plurality for advertising money is also beneficial to the public, in that it prevents the emergence of a search engine monopoly where users would have to pay for requests. Realizing their commonalities, each engine attempts to distinguish itself through some unique fashion to capture the largest audience. Accordingly, we review these engines below:

□ **All-in-one — [www.albany.net/allinone]** All-in-one is a converging webpage for all search engines, dedicated to making general searches on the Internet as seamless as possible. We advise all WWW novices to begin here. Given that All-in-one does not have a search engine of its own, William Cross, the webpage proprietor, is dedicated to adding new engines to the list as they become functional. Thus, relieving the individual need to search for general search engines. The day may come when this webpage, or one very similar, becomes a standard document in extemporaneous preparation rooms.

□ **Altavista — [www.altavista.digital.com]** Without question, Altavista is one of the most comprehensive general search engines on the WWW. As the introduction to their service reads, "By May 1996, the index had grown to more than 30,000,000 pages, and the site was receiving twelve million daily HTTP [search] requests."⁶ Importantly, this engine also provides full-text retrieval to "over 13,000 news groups updated in real time."⁷ Driven by extremely powerful Digital Unix and Digital AlphaServer boxes possessing a unique brand of unconventional 64-bit addressing (very fast), Altavista can keep much of the WWW's text (6 GB) in its continually updated resonant memory, which is, obviously, generated by the AlphaServer's ceaseless automated queries. Translating this gobbledygook to English, Altavista, like many of the other engines yet to be reviewed, actually stores much of the WWW's text on its own hard drives for rapid searching purposes. One of the more powerful self-contained spider engines on the WWW, Altavista does not offer a topical index.

□ **C|net — [www.cnet.com]** One of the more unique sites on the WWW, C|net deserves special recognition as a general searching *point* for having created an online community for those interested in information technologies. While C|net does not maintain a general search engine of its own, like many other sites on the WWW, it does provide a basic menu for the more popular engines listed in this section. The competitor should find C|net's webpage very self-explanatory and easy to use. C|net definitively sets itself apart by being the computer aficionado's community update network. We believe that every director and coach should become a member of this virtual community in order to keep abreast of recent developments in information technology.

□ **EINet's Galaxy** — [galaxy.einet.net] The Galaxy engine is defined as "guide to worldwide information and services," and "is provided as a public service by Trade Wave Corporation."⁸ Having recently upgraded their hardware, Galaxy, like Altavista, is now also powered by a 64-bit AlphaServer, making search requests essentially instantaneous. While sharing a similar server technology, Galaxy does not employ the same retrieval procedure used by Altavista to acquire its information. The engine is, instead, comprised of documents gathered by EINet's Webmasters into either a key-term searchable request format or a topical tree. EINet therefore asks authors of new webpages to submit their work and uniform resource locator (URL) links to Galaxy for review and inclusion. Perhaps one of the most organized of the general engine sort, EINet Galaxy is a refined database that targets selected pages on the WWW. Galaxy is probably one of the more discriminating, yet still functional, engines.

□ **Excite** — [www.excite.com] Excite not only allows the user to access WWW links through key term searches, but also Usenet newsgroup information. Making itself unique through a hierarchical listing of information categories—(1) the Excite search engine, (2) Excite(d) reviews of websites, (3) Excite city.net, (4) the Excite news service, and (5) Excite's hot resource links—Excite's programmers are attempting to build a comprehensive network, involving much more than just a simple search engine. By establishing city.net (a place for travelers to go for information about a planned visit) and the Excite news service (which uses Reuters New Media press reports), Excite is converging the primary information markets on their network.

□ **I-find** — [m5.inference.com/ifind] I-find is different from all of the other search engines on the WWW in that it uses other search engines, in tandem, to find information. Then, the engine actually compares and contrasts the results against one another to remove seemingly redundant postings. Combining results into a compact hierarchical listing under topical headings, I-find limits the disorder of the Internet by seeking only exceptionally related material. As the spider of all spiders, however, we found I-find to be so effective at what it does, that often the multi-engine benefit became a barrier to finding data that we knew existed. Because of its incredibly restricted nature, we believe that I-find should only be used when one wishes to locate major sites. We fear that its highly discriminating standards may, currently, be set a little too high for the current WWW. Inevitably, however, as the WWW continues to de-massify, an engine exactly like I-find will become the torchbearer for users who want to avoid information overload during general searches.

□ **Infoseek** — [www.infoseek.com] Infoseek is the proverbial "Swiss army knife" of general search engines. By far the most versatile tool on the Internet, Infoseek offers WWW, Usenet, Telnet, Gopher, and E-mail searching capabilities. By selecting one of these realms from a scroll-down box, the user can find almost anything on the Internet, including a long lost friend by either phone number or E-mail address. The makers of Infoseek are also experimenting with a new search engine that has been in developmental testing for the past two years, called **Infoseek Ultra**. The programmers designed the Infoseek Ultra engine [ultra.infoseek.com] with features intended to counteract human error, due either to bogus request input or

document improprieties. Infoseek Ultra ignores reflection (mice or mouse), case sensitivity (capitalization), and even abnormal spacings in text (spring time or springtime). In addition, Infoseek Ultra removes those annoying links to dead-end webpages, where information once existed, but has since expired. Using an automated AlphaServer to retrieve its information, Infoseek Ultra currently challenges Altavista's comprehensiveness: "Infoseek Ultra includes an enormous index. It has found over 80 million unique URLs and indexed the full text of over 50 million (so far) to ensure you will get complete results." As a result, Infoseek Ultra is a highly accurate engine, which in the near future, will surely become Infoseek's replacement.

□ **Inktomi** — [inktomi.berkeley.edu/query.html] As the URL suggests, Inktomi is warehoused at the University of California, Berkeley. Named after a mythical shape-shifting spider, who reportedly "brought culture" to the Plains Indians,¹⁰ Inktomi generates its information about the WWW through automated queries, compiling these results into a continually updated database, much like Altavista and Infoseek Ultra. However, the original Inktomi site has been technologically abandoned, and unless supported by an external source, will probably wither on the WWW. Compared to other search engines, many of our simple searches through the Inktomi engine failed to find relevant information on repeated requests. Inktomi's engineers claim that their lack of industry standard hardware hampered the engine's true potential, which is why they recently privatized the Inktomi software design and released a commercialized base called **HOTBOT** — [www.hotbot.com] HOTBOT uses the same Inktomi software design, slightly modified, but on a much more powerful AlphaServer. Not long after activation, the engineers' hypothesis held true to form, producing an unmistakable new competitor in the general search engine market. As their webpage proudly trumpets, "With 54 million documents, HOTBOT is the most complete Web index online."¹¹

□ **Lycos** — [www.lycos.com] The Lycos engine is a time-tested WWW stand by. Being a WWW progenitor, it is openly acknowledged that other spider engines modeled their original designs after Lycos. Taken from the first five letters of the Latin term for Wolf Spider, **Lycosidae**, Lycos permits the user to customize the logic being used to conduct their search through an alternate Lycos engine [www.lycos.com/lycos-form.html]. This engine actually allows the user to select the degree of word-matching sensitivity that the engine should apply when calculating results. We found that this flexibility added a missing element of user-control that none of the other general engines truly supported. In addition, Lycos manages a topical tree index for those who prefer to find their information through subordinated outlines.

□ **Magellan** — [www.mckinley.com] In their words, "Magellan is an online guide to the Internet that includes original editorial content, a directory of rated and reviewed Internet sites, a vast database of yet-to-be-reviewed sites, and a powerful search engine that helps you find what you're looking for." Operated by the McKinley Group, Magellan provides awards and special recognition for outstanding sites. Not limited exclusively to WWW searches, their Webeditors also review hot file transfer protocol (FTP) spots, Gopher servers, newsgroups, and Telnet sessions. Magellan supports both key term spider searches on their automated database, and a rather impressive topical tree index. Taking its name from Ferdinand Magellan, the famous Portuguese